

NETWORK NEWS

INFORMATION FOR PUBLIC AND PRIVATE PARTNERS AND SUPPORTERS

DELIVERING TECHNOLOGY ACCESS TO AMERICA'S COMMUNITIES

STRIVE Transforms the Unemployable Into Employed

Significant numbers of people who are considered unemployable want to work and can succeed in employment. Personal development can be as crucial to success in the workplace as technical skills. Employers often are willing to provide skills training for entry-level employees who have good work attitudes and are willing to learn. Men and women from disadvantaged neighborhoods could be those employees, but they often need training that corrects self-defeating attitudes, develops communication skills and confidence, and builds a realistic understanding of the work environment.¹

STRIVE (Support and Training Result in Valuable Employees), a national nonprofit organization, has developed a successful job training and placement model for people with little or no work experience. This innovative model combines a short, intense period of attitude training—the soft skills needed to survive and excel in any workplace—with job search techniques, rapid placement, and long-term followup.

“People who come to STRIVE are not having an easy time with their lives. They typically cannot get or keep a job,” Jose

¹ Adapted from the STRIVE National Web site, www.strivenational.org/strive.html

Adorno, director of affiliate services, explains. “When you come to us for help with employment, we focus on attitude and how you may be contributing to your own state of affairs. Then we work with you to address any barriers to employment, and prepare you to work, to acquire a job, and to keep it.”

STRIVE evolved from East Harlem Employment Services, Inc., an organization founded in 1985 in response to severe and chronic unemployment in the Greater Harlem area and other economically depressed New York City neighborhoods. According to Adorno, STRIVE’s emphasis on attitudinal development ran counter to the conventional approach of just placing people in a job. In the past 10 years STRIVE has expanded within New York City and has replicated and placed its model into a network of 21 affiliates in the United States and the United Kingdom.

(continued on page 2)



STRIVE Class

INSIDE THIS ISSUE

STRIVE TRANSFORMS THE UNEMPLOYABLE INTO EMPLOYED	1
SER CLOSES GAP FOR HISPANICS	4
NASHVILLE CENTER TRAINS RESIDENTS FOR CAREERS WITH A FUTURE	6
HOW TO FIND EFFECTIVE JOB-TRAINING PROGRAMS	8



U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development
Office of Multifamily Housing Programs
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STRIVE (continued from page 1)

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—Jose Adorno

STRIVE's Track Record

Since the early 1990s, STRIVE National and its affiliates have achieved an impressive track record:

- STRIVE has placed more than 25,000 hard-to-employ individuals (70 percent of its graduates) in jobs.
- Seventy percent of the workers STRIVE places remain employed after 2 years.
- In 2001 STRIVE's nationwide network graduated more than 4,000 individuals from its job-readiness training program and placed more than 3,500 individuals in unsubsidized jobs.

STRIVE's Model

The STRIVE employment program has five core components and an additional career advancement component for core program graduates:

Outreach and intake. To enter STRIVE's training program, a person visits a local affiliate and fills out an application. "Based on the person's personal and employment history, we determine if the person is ready for our program or if they have barriers that would prevent them from

successfully navigating the program and ultimately acquiring employment," Adorno explains. "For example, if someone is dealing with domestic violence, has a drug abuse problem, or is homeless, we design a service plan to address these barriers before that person enters STRIVE's training program."

Core training. STRIVE's signature program is an intensive 3-week workshop that focuses on workplace behavior and attitude. Using a simulated workplace environment, participants learn how to dress and speak appropriately, follow instructions, accept criticism, and function as team members. The core training is short by design, and the goal is to help individuals make the adjustments needed to become employed as quickly as possible. "This course has a group focus, so we need to build trust with everyone who participates. In New York [classes range from] 25 to 35 persons but size varies within the affiliate network," Adorno says.

Job development and placement. Developing the relationship among job developer, participant, and employer is crucial to ensuring a quality and sustainable placement. Job developers broker these

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relationships, working closely with employers to determine their workforce needs and provide participants with the soft skills needed to optimize the employment opportunity. As soon as participants complete the training, the program tries to place them in jobs with a future. However, STRIVE has a no-guarantees approach to ensure that participants earn their new positions.

Graduate services. Long-term followup support includes individual contact and case management for graduates on a quarterly basis for a minimum of 2 years. STRIVE also maintains regular contact with graduates and their employers to ensure that both receive the utmost in customer service and satisfaction.

Onsite social services program. These comprehensive services include case management, short-term counseling, crisis intervention, advocacy, information, and referrals to professional services.

Career path. This service provides advanced attitudinal training and industry-focused postplacement skills training to employed STRIVE graduates who have proven themselves in the labor market and are ready for the next level of career advancement.


STRIVE attempts, and expects, to place graduates in career-track jobs; that is, permanent positions with full benefits packages and starting salaries at or above \$22,000 with tangible opportunities for advancement.

STRIVE's Local Affiliate Network

"Local organizations have two different options to work with STRIVE and replicate its employment training model," Adorno explains. The first option is an

incorporation of a stand-alone 501(c)(3) not-for-profit entity responsible for creating the STRIVE program from the ground up. The second option is a collaboration, which infuses a STRIVE program component into an existing community-based organization's services. It usually takes 1 to 2 years to become an affiliate. New affiliate staff attend the STRIVE Academy to receive a comprehensive introduction to the organization's philosophy, system components, and training strategies.

A Good Match With Neighborhood Networks

"There is potential for future partnerships between STRIVE and Neighborhood Networks," Adorno says. "First of all, we both serve similar client bases. Neighborhood Networks programs focus on residents of HUD insured and assisted housing. Many are receiving housing or other public subsidies. Many of STRIVE's potential clients live in transitional housing, and its training program has historically helped bridge the gap between government dependence and self-sufficiency. Second, STRIVE and Neighborhood Networks' employment program strategies are complementary. We focus more on soft skills, whereas Neighborhood Networks works on technical or hard skills such as computer training." 

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SER Closes Gap for Hispanics

Hispanics represent the fastest growing minority group in the United States. Which organizations are responding to the specific job-training needs of the Hispanic population?

SER-Jobs for Progress National, Inc., has developed an innovative employment training and support model that includes targeted classes such as Programa Sol, an industry-specific English/Spanish training program. The national nonprofit and its 43 local affiliates serve more than 500,000 people each year in 18 states and Puerto Rico. (SER is an acronym for service, employment, and redevelopment.)

“Historically, we are a Hispanic organization,¹ although our programs are open to all ethnic groups,” says James Parsons, SER director of operations. SER National, based in Texas, provides training and technical assistance, research and planning, program and policy development, and fundraising support to its independent affiliates, which provide direct client services such as job training; literacy, English language, and other education classes; employment placement; and support services such as childcare.

Private-Sector Links

In addition to employment and training programs for clients, SER also provides prospective employers with job referrals, customized training, Hispanic recruitment, workplace literacy training, job fairs, and community involvement opportunities.

Another link to the private sector is Amigos de SER, a corporate advisory council that provides financial support, employment opportunities, and business advice. More than 100 Fortune 500 corporations are currently represented in Amigos de SER. SER local affiliates form partnerships with corporate community leaders to gain support for their efforts.

Neighborhood Networks Parallels

“We are natural clients with Neighborhood Networks. We serve the same demographic base and both provide self-sufficiency tools and programs. Some SER local affiliates have developed assisted housing developments with community centers that offer job training and other programs,” Parsons says.

“There is certainly potential for partnerships between our two organizations,” he adds. “Neighborhood Networks centers could work with a local SER, or they could apply to be an affiliate.” SER’s Web site (www.ser-national.org) explains the requirements such as IRS nonprofit status and the process for affiliation.

“We look for viable organizations to become affiliates. Although SER National is a nonprofit group, we must operate as a business, so we need to affiliate with local groups that are sustainable,” Parsons says.

“Our most recent affiliate is El Barrio in Cleveland. Since Cleveland has a growing Hispanic population, the link with SER is natural. SER National will give El Barrio, like all affiliates, access to federal funds and many other resources. While local affiliates focus on getting local resources and partners, SER National builds on [the work of local affiliates]



*El Barrio Board with
President Bush*

¹ The League of United Latin American Citizens and the American GI Forum, the two oldest and largest Hispanic volunteer organizations in the United States, founded SER.

and on their resources. We add value to what local affiliates do,” he adds.


Array of Employment Resources

Through national partnerships with The National Council of La Raza, the National Urban League, Cisco Systems, and other groups, SER National provides local affiliates with a comprehensive array of training opportunities, programs, and other resources:

- **Staff training.** SER National identifies common topics of interest and holds national trainings for its affiliates. “For example, we recently held a workshop in Dallas on grant writing. We also help local SER sites fill out grant applications,” Parsons adds.
- **Replicable program models.** Working with its national partners, SER develops training curricula that local affiliates can replicate and adapt. In cooperation with the Home Builders Institute and the Hearst Foundation, SER developed construction-skills training for adjudicated youth, which is now being offered at several local affiliate sites.
- **Targeted, up-to-date curricula and technology.** SER offers innovative programs such as industry-specific

English/Spanish training to meet clients’ needs. SER also helps affiliates use the latest technology whether they are offering computer-repair classes, distance-learning courses, or certified Cisco Networking Academies® (see below).

SER and Cisco Systems

Because of its commitment to preparing high-tech workers, SER National partners with Cisco Systems, a leading manufacturer of Internet networking equipment. To date, 10 SER affiliates offer onsite Cisco Networking Academies that train participants to design, build, and maintain computer networks. SER participants who complete the program and receive certification can secure high-paying jobs. If they earn a second level of certification, they may reach even higher salary levels, according to Parsons. 

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Technical Assistance Guides Relevant to Employment and Training

- *Helping Residents Achieve Self-Sufficiency: How to Design and Deliver Career Growth and Advancement Assistance*
- *How to Design and Deliver an Effective Job Development and Placement Program*
- *Engaging Education: Integrating Work, Technology, and Learning for Adults*
- *No Car? No Problem! Innovative Transportation Solutions*

You can download these guides from HUD’s Web site (<http://www.hud.gov/offices/hsg/mfh/nnw/nnwindex.cfm>) or order the guides by calling Neighborhood Networks at (888) 312-2743.

Nashville Center Trains Residents for Careers With a Future

Job openings for cooks and food preparation workers are expected to be plentiful through 2010.... People who have had courses in commercial food preparation may be able to start in a better paying cook or chef job without having to spend time in a lower skilled kitchen job.¹

The Family Center at Berkshire Place, a Neighborhood Networks center in Nashville, Tennessee, is preparing residents for professional careers in the food service industry. Family Affair Ministries (FAM), Inc., a local faith-based organization, sponsors training that combines food preparation, classroom instruction, internships, preparation for professional certification exams, and job-readiness skills.

“Dair Sutton, FAM co-Chief Executive Officer (CEO) and a chef himself, realized that training Berkshire Place residents for food services careers had double benefits. Most of our residents are young women with children,” explains Vera Davis, operations director. “Not only would they learn to cook nutritious meals for their families, they also would gain very employable skills with a future. Reverend Sutton also believed that people with limited education or with disabilities could succeed in this training and this field.”

Second Harvest Community Kitchens

“In developing the career training, FAM decided to affiliate with a national non-profit food bank, America’s Second

Harvest, and use its successful curriculum model—America’s Table Community Kitchen,” Davis continues. “This program uses the ServSafe curriculum, which has the National Restaurant Association’s endorsement. This meant that our own training program would meet industry standards, giving graduates good employment prospects. Moreover, they [the graduates] would typically begin at higher salaries than people without this training and certification.”

“ServSafe covers all stages of food supply and preparation—from crop to consumer,” Davis explains. Students learn to prepare food, use and care for kitchen equipment, plan menus, control food costs, purchase food in quantity, and select and store food. They also learn about hotel and restaurant sanitation and public health rules for handling food.

The 90-day training allows adults to gain knowledge, hands-on experience, and valuable life skills that make them successful in the food service industry. “After 30 days everyone takes a food handler exam, the first step in receiving ServSafe certification. At the end of the course, students take the ServSafe exam. They need to score 80 points or higher to receive certification. If they score 90 points, they can become ServSafe instructors and teach others,” Davis adds.

“We also stress job-readiness skills: self-esteem, preparing résumés, how to apply for a job, and work attitudes like being on time and keeping a job,” she

¹ *Occupational Outlook Handbook*, 2002–03 edition, U.S. Department of Labor.

emphasizes. “If students need to improve their reading skills or do not have high school diplomas, we also work with them on that. They will be more competitive if they are high school graduates and have good basic skills.”

The first 90-day training at the Family Center began last September. Seven out of the nine people enrolled completed the course. Four passed the exam and received ServSafe certification, and three are planning to take the exam again in March. Food service jobs at restaurants, hotels, hospitals, schools, and nonprofit groups will be available to all who receive certification.

“Graduates have already found employment. One is now a kitchen manager for a local nonprofit group. The Senior Citizens’ Meals on Wheels Program and Food Staff Temporary Agency have hired other students. Another graduate is enrolled in Tennessee Technological University’s culinary arts program,” Davis reports.

Successful Partnership Strategies

“We rely on a variety of resources and partners to cover training costs,” Davis says. “The program costs \$900 per person and includes classroom instruction, food preparation, two exams, and field trips as well as food and other cooking supplies. Each student also receives a uniform to wear throughout the training and cooking utensils, like thermometers, that she typically needs for her first job.”

How do students pay for the course?
“People eligible for Families First (Tennessee’s welfare-to-work program) receive

reimbursement for job training. However,” Davis explains, “None of the students in our September training were eligible for the state training subsidy. For these students, FAM and center fundraisers cover the costs.”

FAM has several partnership strategies to draw on and build community support. FAM’s Community Kitchen advisory board is made up of representatives from nonprofit groups and businesses involved in the food industry such as the Renaissance Hotel, Vanderbilt University, Centennial Hospital, St. Thomas Hospital, Scruggs Restaurant Supply Company, Food Staff, and Second Harvest. “These board members not only bring their expertise, they also represent prospective employers for our students. Students from Vanderbilt University teach nutrition classes,” Davis adds. “We also host corporate breakfast fundraisers four times a year. Residents prepare the food, the corporate guests make a donation, and we give the guests breakfast and a presentation about the Community Kitchen training.”

A group of 12 aspiring chefs began training in February and graduated in May. A new group will begin training in October. **NN**

For further information about the food services training at the Family Center at Berkshire Place, contact:

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How to Find Effective Job-Training Programs

What constitutes an effective job-training program? How do you find one? The following qualities characterize successful job-training programs:

- **Proven track record.** Was the program successful only during the economic boom of the late 1990s or does it have a longer history of success?
- **Sustainable results.** Are placements still employed after 3 or 6 months? Does the program track graduates' employment records?
- **Replicable.** Assess critical program components (such as staff expertise or equipment) when replicating a program at another location. Programs that depend on one resource, such as the director's personality, are not useful models.
- **Cost effectiveness.** What is the per-person cost of the program?
- **Innovative.** Does the program achieve innovative results or new use of resources?
- **Recognition from workforce professionals.** Successful programs gain acceptance from professionals outside the program.
- **Support from employers.** Are there any testimonials? Do employers continue to hire people from the program? Are there employers you could call as references?
- **Support from graduates.** Are there satisfaction surveys or testimonials? Are there people you could call as references? 